

on railroad cars full of peasants
with swollen eyes, chickens,
gauchos, hoods.
Now here in the city
in a half-empty bar,
to lose a wallet!
And what was most important
seemed to matter least --
driver's license, social security card,
blood type, insurance number --
they would be replaced --
but a pocket calendar
in the middle of the year?
I still knew the day and the date
but not where the day's particular block
was located in relation to all the others
in its reassuring, geometric grid.
And the random addresses --
I would have to wait now
for all the people I had met
in restaurants, bars, trains,
at parties, in planes,
to get in touch with me
if they wanted to
and maybe they really didn't.
And there were so many other things
I had in there
that I couldn't even remember.
I bought another one fast
and filled it with money and food stamps,
but it always felt empty
especially when someone
would pass me on the street
his back pocket bulging
with everything but his soul.

THE PRODIGY

By some lucky break
the kid got adopted
by the people
who bought the house
where his real parents
had lived.
He loved it
because of the big bay window
that had a view of the bridge
suspended over the water
but he never looked
out of the window

he just
rode his tricycle
back and forth
in front of it
all day.
He never thought
of his real parents
who kept to their bedrooms
upstairs, mostly --
he just
rode his tricycle
back and forth
all day
with the venetian blinds up
and the sun cutting through
the eucalyptus leaves
across the street.

-- Albert Stainton

San Francisco CA

PANTIES

In September you discover them
among the rubble of beer cans
beneath the front seat of the Ford.

What can you do with old panties?
You put them in the desk's middle drawer
with the check registers and the staples.

Your wife discovers them while reconciling accounts.
You wave them like a white flag
and use them for Kleenex.

Years later you find them
among the tatters of the rag bag.

You douse them with lemon oil
and polish the secretary
grinning like a snapshot from the 50's
at a small-town rummage sale.

-- Ed Ochester

Shelocta PA